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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BASRAH 000121

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SUBJECT: DETERIORATING SECURITY IMPACTING REO BASRAH

REF: A) BASRAH 73, B) BASRAH 79, C) BASRAH 84

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BASRAH, DEPARTMENT OF STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (g)

¶1. (C) Summary: Following the arrest of a high ranking Jaysh al Mahdi (JAM) member on July 16 by the British military, the REO Basrah Palace compound has come under significant increased indirect fire (IDF) attacks, severely impacting REO operations. There is insufficient space in hard buildings for all 390 REO personnel, and long hours spent in poorly ventilated and cramped bunkers over the course of the past five days has affected all personnel and REO operations adversely. Air transport into and out of the palace compound has been reduced significantly since the increased attacks began, resulting in the cancellation of meetings and delays in personal leave. The increased attacks that began with the arrest campaign of JAM members are likely to continue as long as the arrest campaign itself does. The British and Danish Missions also housed on the compound are pursuing staff reductions as a result of the attacks. Alternatives for staffing and operations at the U.S. REO also need to be explored. End summary.

Significant Increase in IDF Attacks

¶2. (C) Following an arrest operation of a high ranking JAM member Sajed Badr, aka Abu Aya, by British forces during the early morning of July 16, REO Basrah has experienced an increase in IDF attacks. There have also been increased attacks on other MNF-I bases and targets in Basrah since July 16, contributing to an overall significant decrease in Basrah's security environment. A breakdown of IDF is as follows:

- On the night of July 16 at 2140, Basrah Palace was attacked with nine rockets and four mortars from three separate firing points. One rocket landed within the REO compound in the water barrier that separates the US REO from the Romanian compound. The rest of the indirect fire landed in the vicinity of just outside front gate of the REO or overshot the compound and landed in the Shatt Al Arab River. No injuries to personnel or damage to property resulted from the incident.

- Later on July 16 at 2340, Basrah Palace was hit with an additional four rockets. Three rounds landed in the Romanian compound and one landed 100 meters from an REO guard tower. No injuries to personnel or damage to property resulted from the incident. However, an Iraqi woman living in a house near the REO was killed by one of the rockets that missed the REO compound. Two additional mortars were launched toward the palace during the early morning of July 17.

- On July 17 at 2355, Basrah Palace was attacked by four rounds of IDF mortars. One round landed on a house on the perimeter of the REO's front gate. The other rounds landed on the British

and Romanian compounds. No injuries to personnel or damage to property resulted from the incident.

- On July 18 at 0530, three mortars were launched against the palace with one landing and detonating just inside the REO's front gate. A third country national guard sustained shrapnel injuries to both of his legs as well as his head and was evacuated to Shaibah Logistics Base for medical attention.

- On July 18 between 1430 and 1500, the palace was fired upon again with four mortars that overshot the compound and landed in the Shatt Al Arab River. No injuries to personnel or damage to property resulted from the incident.

- On July 19 at 2200, three rockets were launched at the palace. One of the rockets detonated inside the residential trailer area of the REO, the first time a rocket has landed in this area, and another rocket landed on the helicopter landing area inside the British side of the compound. The rocket landed and detonated about three feet from the front door of a residential trailer. No injuries were sustained by REO personnel. The concrete barrier in front of the row of trailers took the brunt of the damage, and damage to the trailers in the area was caused.

- On July 20 at 2225, five rockets were launched against the REO compound. None of the rockets landed inside the compound. The impacts were at least one kilometer to the south and to the east of the compound.

Adverse Impact on REO Operations

¶3. (C) REO activities have been severely impacted by the ongoing attacks. State Department personnel have cancelled all scheduled meetings inside the compound since July 17 due to the threat of daylight attacks. Iraqi contacts have cancelled meetings with REO staff at locations outside the compound since July 16. A PSD run to the Basrah Airport for July 21 was cancelled by the British military headquarters due to the inability to provide QRF support. The remaining locally engaged political/economic assistant has been advised not to appear for

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work at the REO since July 18 due to the threat of daylight IDF attacks. Increased security measures have further constrained travel to the other side of the compound where the British Consulate and PRT Building are located. Attacks against MNF-I targets in Basrah city have increased since July 16, including contractor personal security detail (PSD) teams.

¶4. (C) REO personnel reside in trailers without hard cover and are evacuated to bunkers during IDF attacks. These bunkers provide adequate protection against IDF for short periods of time, but are poorly ventilated, cramped and not designed to serve as accommodation for an entire night. According to the KBR Project Lead, sleep deprivation is adversely impacting staff performance, many of whom are already over-extended due to the minimal number of local nationals still working at Basrah Palace (Ref C).

¶5. (C) If further sustained IDF attacks occur, the REO will be faced with a significant challenge to accommodate all REO personnel under hard cover overnight or for extended periods of time. The U.S. REO side of the compound has only five hard structures, of indeterminate protective standards, that are too small to accommodate all 390 personnel. Following the July 19 attack, REO personnel were evacuated from trailers and bunkers within a 200 meter radius of the rocket impact site until British artillery personnel could ascertain that the rocket had already detonated and posed no further threat. As a result, the EOB housed an additional 50 people for approximately three hours in offices and hallways on available floor space. Remaining personnel stayed in bunkers or in one of the other smaller hardened buildings on the compound. The REO has allowed State and USAID personnel to sleep in the EOB since July 17, but the

building contains no cots and only one functioning bathroom. KBR is currently working with the RSO to install air conditioning units in the existing hardened conex boxes that serve as bunkers until hardened concrete bunkers can be constructed that allow for better airflow and greater capacity for personnel.

Other Missions Considering Drawdown

¶ 6. (C) At a July 20 Provincial Reconstruction Team meeting, the British military liaison announced that the British mission was in the process of identifying mission essential personnel in order to reduce numbers on the compound due to security concerns.

¶ 7. (C) Since July 17, the 16 Danish Mission personnel have been sleeping in the hard building that serves as their office because of the threat of constant IDF. The head of the Danish Mission has advised the Deputy Regional Coordinator that further sustained IDF attacks on the compound will result in an evacuation of all non-essential personnel. On July 21, five Danish Mission personnel requested to leave the Basrah Palace compound.

Air Transport

¶ 8. (C) Movement into and out of Basrah Palace by helicopter became significantly more challenging following the attack on a British helicopter on May 6 that resulted in the deaths of five British military personnel. Since this attack, helicopter traffic into and out of Basrah Palace has been limited to nighttime hours. The already serious problem of air travel has been exacerbated by nighttime IDF attacks as helicopters have been unable to land at the palace at night since July 16. Consequently, there is a backlog of over 100 passengers waiting for transport out of Basrah Palace.

Local Nationals

¶ 9. (C) Out of 220 Local National (LN) personnel contracted to KBR, 108 LNs appeared for duty on July 17. Following the July 18 early morning attack, no LNs were allowed in to the REO compound for work that day. On July 19, 98 LNs appeared for duty, and on July 20, 101 LNs appeared. These LNs perform routine cleaning and maintenance duties; their appearance is not essential for REO operations to continue. Their absence results in longer waits for laundry service, trash collection, and processing work request orders to be completed. All basic life support services are currently being performed by KBR direct-hire personnel.

¶ 10. (C) Comment: The current drain on REO personnel and resources as a result of the sustained IDF attacks on the compound is unsustainable. State Department personnel are currently unable to conduct normal business. Transport into and out of the Basrah Palace compound by helicopter has become significantly more difficult, and this is currently the only means of transportation, particularly to the airport for onward flights. The REO does not have the capacity to house all of its

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personnel in hardened structures, and its bunkers are not designed for the extended residence required for protection from a sustained campaign of IDF over a long period. This increase in violent activity does not just impact the REO; other MNF-I bases, Coalition targets and personnel in southern Iraq are also being impacted by the surge in violence. REO activities have been adversely impacted to the point that alternatives to staffing and operations, such as being considered by the Danish and British Missions also housed on the compound, need to be considered. End comment.

MARRANO